

YELLOWSTONE RIVER CONSERVATION DISTRICT COUNCIL

CONSERVATION DISTRICT MEMBERS: Carbon, Custer, Dawson, Park, Prairie, Richland, Rosebud, Stillwater, Sweet Grass, Treasure, Yellowstone, McKenzie County North Dakota, RAC Chairman

Meeting Minutes -- May 17, 2007

MSU-Billings College of Business – Room 163

Members Present: Don Youngbauer, Rosebud CD; Paul Gilbert, Sweet Grass CD; Tony Barone, Richland CD; Bob Hector, Yellowstone CD; Dave Schwarz, Prairie CD; Phil Fox, Treasure CD; Will Alexander, Carbon CD; Walter Rolf, Custer CD; John Moorhouse, RAC Chairman and Orvin Finsaas, McKenzie ND, CD.

Others Present: Warren Kellogg, NRCS/TAC; Burt Williams, TNC/RAC; Robert Lubbers, YRF; Laurie Zeller, DNRC; Gay Easton, Yellowstone CD; Jim Robinson, DNRC/TAC; Mack Cole, RAC; Mike Penfold, Yellowstone River Forum; Dale Vermillion, RAC; Pat Riley, DNRC; LaVerne Ivie, Yellowstone CD; Nicole McClain, YRCDC Coordinator; Jennifer Cramer, Treasure County Weed District Supervisor; Rachel Stagg, Senator Tester's Office; Mike Volesky, Governor's Office; Kelly Norwood, Project Assistant, and Carol Watts, Custer CD Administrator.

Chairman Don Youngbauer called the meeting to order at 10:00am on Thursday, May 17, 2007. Introductions were made.

Executive Committee update: Don Youngbauer reported on the Executive Committee meeting that was held this morning at 8:30. In attendance were himself, Walter Rolf, Bob Hector, Laurie Zeller, Warren Kellogg and Nicole McClain. The Committee will recommend to the Council that they adopt a mission statement that puts forth a unified idea of what the Council is all about. A strategy for how the Council will stand on the Russian olive tree will be the focus of the day. Discussion will be come later after Jennifer Cramer of the Treasure Weed district gives her talk.

TAC update: See Warren Kellogg's attached notes. The TAC met April 29th and May 1st. The reports for Susan Gilbertz's Cultural inventory have been finalized and the Army Corps of Engineers is printing those reports. Warren asked if there was any problem with posting those reports to the web site. There was no problem. Notices will be sent out to the people that were interviewed that the reports are available. Susan Gilbertz has offered to attend conservation district meetings to discuss the reports. Any reports that go out will have a cover letter go out with them explaining who sponsored the reports and what the Council is all about.

Warren has visited all the conservation districts with the exception of Park CD and McKenzie ND, CD.

Warren has started the riparian work in Custer and Stillwater counties. Ten sites have been done with six of those on private land, and the landowners have been receptive so far. Other counties will be visited this summer.

USGS has been contracted to finish the bridge surveys. The remaining counties on the topographic mapping will be ready to be flown by this fall and the information will be available next spring. Jim Robinson commented that landowners would need to be contacted later on to get the ground control established.

The TAC has been working on the wetlands and fisheries scopes of work and will bring these to the Council in late summer. The other scope of work in development is information management (GIS). Jim Robinson has taken the lead on this and is looking at how best to make information readily available internally to people involved in the study, and externally to the public. It is thought that the internal segment will be password protected until the information is complete.

The 310-demonstration project that the Yellowstone CD volunteered for is taking longer than expected, and is more complex than anticipated. DTM has come up with a process of using Google Maps, which is very encouraging. The DTM contract has been amended so this work can be completed.

The report is complete on the Pryor Creek fish passage options. Warren commented that two options were documented and a third option was available but not listed. A request was made that the third option be included. Bob Hector stated he thought it was a good report and that the third option should be added as a supplement. John Moorhouse made a motion to accept the report, Bob Hector seconded, and the motion carried by voice vote.

The BLM – Government Land Office (GLO) historical survey notes that Kelly Norwood was researching proved to contain good information but retrieval is labor intensive. John Moorhouse said that BLM is in the process of putting the notes on their website so it no longer seems imperative to have Kelly continue with the research.

Warren Kellogg presented the Council with a draft of best management practices to prevent the spread of Russian olive trees. Mike Penfold urged the Council to take a leadership role in this area. Mack Cole provided input on what was being done in Treasure County. Mack sits on the Department of Agriculture, Noxious Weed Trust Fund Grant program Committee, which grants out about 2 million dollars a year. In order to qualify for this funding, counties must list the Russian olive tree as a noxious weed. County Commissioners in Treasure County proposed listing the Russian olive as a noxious weed in the riparian areas along the Yellowstone River. Several Council members shared what was going on in their counties. Warren Kellogg spoke about special management zones, which would also qualify for funding.

Jennifer Cramer spoke about the dangers and hard work of trying to eradicate the Russian olive tree. She displayed picture boards that depicted work that was done on Howrey Island in Treasure County. She suggested a tour of the area. After listening to Jennifer Cramer, Paul Gilbert made a motion to accept the recommendation written by Warren Kellogg with the addition of the word “voluntary”. John Moorhouse seconded the motion and it passed by majority voice vote. Warren Kellogg will amend the recommendation and present it at the June meeting. Council members were asked to take the draft recommendations back to their conservation district boards for further discussion.

Business meeting: Treasurer’s report was given by Carol Watts. The financial statement shows all the activity in the account since the last meeting and the grant statement shows where we are with the grants. Carol reported that the 319 grant is now closed and will no longer show on the grant statement. The financial reports were accepted and filed for audit.

Minutes from the March 22, 2007 meeting were approved with John Moorhouse making the motion, Paul Gilbert seconded and the motion carried by voice vote.

Coordinator’s Report: Nicole McClain, Council Coordinator handed out her report to the Council members. Nicole reported that she had attended CD meetings at Park, Treasure, Yellowstone, and Carbon Counties. She reported that the National Fish & Wildlife Foundation grant was fully funded. It is for the Russian Olive/ Salt Cedar Pilot Demonstration project. John Moorhouse, Stacy Barta, Amy Adler, Scott Bockness, and Nicole met to form a plan to execute the project.

The NRCS Conservation Innovation Grant (CIG) is in the process of being written. The title of the proposal is the Yellowstone River OrthoViewer: A Land-use Planning Tool. Nicole requested that a member of the Council and the RAC step forward to be on the grant review committee; Dale Vermillion and John Moorhouse volunteered. The purpose of this committee is to review upcoming grants as to their suitability for the Council and to help Nicole by reviewing the applications with her.

The next grant discussed was the PPL Community Fund grant that is due 7/31/07. The Beartooth RC&D will sponsor this grant, which is for \$10,000.00 and will be used to provide Yellowstone River corridor-specific natural resource data to the public. The Council granted approval to proceed.

Meetings and workshops that Nicole recently attended include the following: the Conservation Atlas of the Northwest presentation in Bozeman, the Get That Grant workshop in Bozeman 4/16 – 4/19/07, The Big Look regarding a new display, FEMA, Pre-Disaster Mitigation meeting; the YRCDC TAC meeting; the Salt Cedar/Russian olive demo project kick-off, and a meeting with Susan Gilbertz, MSU-Billings regarding a new project.

Nicole brought a different showcase for our current display that proved to be inconvenient to use, she will look for better options. She also requested the possibility of purchasing a digital projector. The Council agreed that the projector was a good idea and directed her by consensus to go ahead with the purchase.

“Fact Finding Tour”: The possibility of having a Yellowstone River tour for the Army Corps of Engineers representatives while the Secretary John Paul Woodley, Jr. is in the area was discussed. Colonel Bedey will also attend. The cost would be approximately \$2,500.00. It was decided that Laverne Ivy, Yellowstone CD Administrator would help Nicole plan and coordinate this effort. Funding would be available through the pass through grant.

YR Forum Projects: Mike Penfold said that last fall the Forum had started working with Montana fish, Wildlife and Parks, the Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, State Lands and the Public Land Access Association to take a look at part of the Yellowstone River that does not have public access from Big Timber to Yellowstone County. The Forum is considering hiring someone who would be able to research what the options are for gaining more public access. The other item they are interested in is stronger research capability in the Yellowstone River valley in consideration of all the sustainable issues that are faced over a long period.

Yellowstone River Clean Up: Bob Hector said the plan is to schedule the crews by June 1st so that the information can be passed on to the local conservation districts. Nicole will meet with the Montana Conservation Corps on May 22, 2007. Bob reported that we were logged into the National group and things are going very well. It was originally planned to get together at Pompey's Pillar the end of the clean up on Saturday to discuss the activities of the week. However, a Lewis and Clark event is scheduled to kickoff at that time so the use of Pompey's Pillar will not be possible. Bob said the Audubon Society expressed an interest in sponsoring a boat float event on Sunday as a kick-off for the clean up project. A cookout could be planned afterwards and the media would be invited.

Letter from Glendive: The YRCDC has received a letter from the City of Glendive requesting support from the Council for an investigation to improve flooding problems in the Glendive area. There was not enough information provided in the letter and it was decided to invite a representative from Glendive to the next meeting.

Paul Gilbert reported on the Legislative session that he and Nicole attended in March when they lobbied for the additional \$40,000.00 needed for our operating budget. The Council was awarded \$100,000.00 for the next two years and Nicole thanked everyone for his or her help in achieving that.

Nicole is scheduled to be at the Park CD on June 5, 2007 and plans to travel to Prairie, Dawson, Richland and McKenzie CDs in the month of June. She has future meetings concerning the Yellowstone Clean Up project and the Corps visit to Montana.

Nicole announced that her vacation dates have been rescheduled for 8/1-8/10/07.

Discussion:

Intake Discussion/Position: Orvin Finsaas of the Lower Yellowstone River Irrigation Board asked the Council to support the COE's plan for a fish passage at the Intake Diversion. After some discussion, Burt Williams offered to write a draft recommendation for the Intake fish passage and present it at the June meeting.

The agenda for the June meeting will include accepting Robert Lubbers as a new RAC member. The draft recommendations for the Russian olive and the Intake Fish Passage will be reviewed. Boris Krizek, City of Billings will be invited to speak at the meeting. Laurie Zeller said that a plan, budget, and 2007 report needs to be put together.

The next TAC meeting will be June 18 and 19, 2007. Warren said those dates were subject to change.

The next YRCDC meeting will be June 21, 2007.

Public Comment: There was no public comment. The meeting adjourned at 2:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Carol Watts, CCCD Administrator

Yellowstone River Technical Advisory Committee
Meeting Notes: 4/29-5/1/2007
Billings, MT

Socioeconomic

Cultural Inventory: The ACOE will be copying the cultural inventory reports that will be available in the next couple weeks. The Council will need to do the distribution of the report. We also talked about:

- Posting the report to the YRCDC web site.
- Sending notices to interviewees with information on how to access the report
- Susan presenting this information to individual CD Boards this summer or CD Area Meeting next fall upon request.
- When hard copies of the report are provided, include a cover letter with the YRCDC letterhead.

Channel Dynamics

Geomorphology:

- For the time being, YRCDC funds will be used for this scope of work. They will contract out to the private sector and use DNRC personnel.

Hydrology:

- ACOE Omaha is currently building a HEC-HMS model for the basin. There is an estimated 60K in the 2007 budget for continued ACOE in-house work on this SOW.

Hydraulics;

- ACOE workload is high this year, but they would still like to keep this scope in-house. Stillwater and Dawson County floodplain maps still need to be completed. The ACOE is seeking FEMA funds to develop these maps.
- Bridge surveys will be completed by USGS this summer. There are 18 bridges and trestles that remain to be surveyed below the Big Horn River confluence.

Topographic Mapping:

- The ACOE will contract with one of their vendors to collect the LiDAR terrain data and orthophotography for the remaining counties this coming fall. It would be processed and available by spring 2008.

Biology

Wetlands: George Jordan up-dated the TAC on a grant pre-proposal recently submitted to Montana DEQ for their review (EPA Region 8 funding). It resulted in not being supported by DEQ's review team. Primary reasons given were that the requested amount was too high, there were not enough partners contributing to the effort, and they felt the public outreach and education component was not strong enough.

George followed with a discussion on the existing wetlands SOW which currently is a trend analysis, but has not been totally fleshed out since the PMP was approved. Several felt there needed to be more emphasis on wetland function (i.e. water retention, hydrology, terrestrial wildlife, etc.) rather than just temporal trend. After much discussion, it was decided to invite a few wetland scientists to the June TAC meeting for additional input. The TAC will be developing discussion questions prior to the June meeting.

Riparian:

Russian Olive BMP draft recommendation: Warren Kellogg circulated a draft recommendation regarding Russian olive management along the Yellowstone River and the establishment of "Special Management Zones" as an approach to managing Russian olive. There were several suggestions on revisions and additions. Burt Williams will assist with a rewrite and it will again be sent out to the TAC for their review and comments. If possible, the revised recommendation will be taken to the Council at their May 17th meeting.

Tony Thatcher reviewed their final report "*Yellowstone River Riparian Vegetation Delineation and Fragmentation Metrics Prototype*" that was recently submitted to the TAC. The prototype analysis consists of a GIS-based summary of riparian vegetation along the Yellowstone River within two study reaches over a span of 55 years. The objective of the prototype was to explore the benefits and drawbacks of different methods of riparian vegetation pattern analysis. The bottom-line recommendation was not to go with a FRAGSTATS model, but instead, stay with a traditional GIS-based analysis of riparian patterns. Tony included an estimated scope and budget in his report to expand this work into the remaining study reaches.

Fisheries: George Jordan invited several fisheries specialists (Matt Jaeger-FWP and Brad Schmitz-FWP) to the TAC meeting to discuss the fisheries scope of work. Ken Frazier-FWP, a member of the TAC, was also part of the panel. The following items were recommended for the revised SOW:

- 1) Revise the study scope to include habitat study efforts on the Big Horn River (hydrology and sediment impacts to the Yellowstone River).
 - 2) Link the original draft fisheries SOW to the habitat efforts currently being conducted by MFWP (a study scope that Matt Jaeger is the lead contact for, to be completed by 2009).
 - 3) Evaluate existing bathymetry data to see if those data are applicable and useful for the fisheries SOW. Bathymetry data is available for Yellowstone, Stillwater, and Dawson Counties.
 - 4) Include a budget item to acquire/evaluate historic Big Horn River aerial photography. The entire fisheries SOW budget will need to be revised to reflect current costs and the revised scope.
- George will coordinate the review of these revisions with the TAC prior to the June TAC meeting. The revised SOW will then go to the YRCDC for their review. The ACOE would like to have an approved SOW contracted with the MSU Cooperative Fisheries Unit by September.

Water Quantity: George handed out a project summary written by Dennis Scarnecchia (Univ. of Idaho) and Brad Schmitz (FWP) titled: "*Hydrograph trends, water withdrawals, and native fish habitat in the Yellowstone River*". This proposal is already fully funded using a mix of federal and non-federal funds. A version of this proposal could be used to develop a new Water Quantity SOW to be added to the Yellowstone River CES Project Management Plan. George is asking for comments prior to the June TAC meeting.

Projects

Pryor Creek Fish Passage: Brent Esplin (BOR) reviewed the alternatives outlined in a feasibility report for fish passage on two sites on Pryor Creek. The final report is nearly complete and will be distributed within a couple weeks. Brent also mentioned that the supplemental report on the inverted siphon option will be completed in June.

Russian Olive/Salt Cedar Demonstration: The YRCDC has been notified that their grant application was approved for funding (20K). Nicole will set up a meeting with the Sweet Grass and Rosebud Weed Supervisors to begin organizing the demonstration project. She will also invite interested members from the RAC and TAC. Treatment will likely take place this fall. There will also need to be a public information component to this demo that the RAC may get involved with.

Interstate 94 Bridge at Glendive: The City of Glendive has sent a letter (April 11, 2007) to the YRCDC requesting that they support the investigation of the I-94 bridge to improve flooding problems in Glendive. They are also asking to meet with the YRCDC regarding this request. A meeting date is tentatively scheduled for the end of May. This investigation could be part of the CES, but there could be some additional costs associated with it.

Miles City Flooding: The ACOE will be meeting with Miles City again on May 31st regarding their flood dikes surrounding the town. Unsure of what the YRCDC involvement should be.

Information Management

Information Management/GIS Scope of Work (SOW): Jim Robinson provided a compilation of background information associated with the current GIS/Information Management SOW dated November 2003. Several potential GIS hosting entities (NRIS, MSU-Billings, ACOE, and DNRC) participated in the discussion providing insight on how their organizations might help with serving and "packaging" the Yellowstone CES data/information, both for short term internal use by the principle investigators working on the Yellowstone CES and long-term, external access to the general public. Several ideas were expressed throughout the course of the discussion that will serve as the framework for a revised scope of work. Jim will continue to work with TAC and other information management professionals to flesh out the revised SOW. This will be brought back to the TAC at their June meeting.

310 Permit Web Application: Tony Thatcher (DTM Consulting) gave a presentation on the 310 web application and database design using the Google Map interface. It's a different approach, far more user-friendly than the IMS technology we were headed down. They will submit a proposed scope and budget to the TAC to finish the Yellowstone County prototype.